The IDLER

Public Occurrences, Comment, Excursions & Rational Entertainment

Nr 33 SUMMER 1967 25c THE COPY

Counting Railroad Ties With LBJ

OTHER WASHINGTON NOTES

In Which We Harken Once More to the Words of Our Leader; Some Thoughts on Thermopolitics are Offered; Sam Darcy Considers the Glorious War; Charles McDowell Jr. Takes a Walk; As Well As Several Other Diversions.

THE man whom Gore Vidal calls our cornpone Genghis Khan has been out conquering the literary steppes again. Urged on by the cheering hordes of Baltimore's Junior Chamber of Commerce last June, the President offered a stunning answer to critics of America:

"We produce more goods; we transport more goods; we use more goods than anyone in the world. We own almost a third of the world's railroad tracks. We own almost two-thirds of the world's automobiles.... We own half the trucks in the world. We own almost half of all the radios in the world. We own a fourth of all the steel. Our health conditions rank favorably with those of other countries in the world. Although we have only about 6 per cent of the population of the world, we haye half of its wealth.

"Bear in mind that the other 94 per cent of the population would like to trade with us.

"Maybe a better way of saying it would be that they would like to exchange places with us.

"I would like to see them enjoy the blessings that we enjoy. But don't you help them exchange places with us--because I don't want to be where they are."

This, one should remember, was the President of the United States--not of the Junior Chamber of Commerce--who was speaking. His moral was straightforward. If we all would stay home counting railroad ties instead of paying attention to the "bare dozen peaceniks" who walked over the tulips at the Pentagon, "then the cussers and the doubters will be relegated to the rear; the doers and the builders will take up the front lines."

The weakness in the President's line of reasoning was noted a few days earlier in another political speech:

"Democrats cannot speak tonight only of the proud past that they have all helped to build. They must speak tonight of the gap between what is and what ought to be. What is that?

"--When millions of American children still lack decent medical care,

"--When one out of every six Americans lives in a slum,

"--When filth is heavy in the air, in our rivers, our lakes and our waters,

"--When Americans do not feel safe on the streets at night or even in the daytime or in their own homes,

"--When millions of Americans have less than 75 cents a day to spend on the food that they eat,

"--When all these things are true, we cannot luxuriate in our record. We

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Published 11 months a year in Washington, D. C., for the edification, information, and entertainment of its readers. Twenty five cents the copy. Three Dollars a year (Four Dollars abroad).
Editor: sam smith
413 Sixth Street NE
Washington, D. C. 20002
(202) 546-9662
Associate Editors:
Mike Bell
Erbin Crowell
Circulation, correspondence, and coffee:
Saundra Joyner

have much to do. Much more to do. The clock is ticking."

The President should understand these words. He spoke them.

That Mr. Johnson should, with such flair, warn us not to luxuriate in something one night and then himself bask blissfully in it a few days later is a strong indication that George Romney is going to have a tough go of it in the ambivalence sweepstakes. Such flip-top oratory follows a canon of Lyndon Johnson's common law which journalist Philip Geyelin has concisely noted:

"Things you do may be irretrievable--but almost nothing you say is."

There is, however, the problem of the identity of the real Lyndon Johnson. Is he the man brooding over the malignant miseries of the nation and the world or the man finding solace from the barbs of the cussers by a bedtime review of statistics in the World Almanac?

One would like to believe he is the former. But then there was that story in the Washington Post the other day about the children starving on a street in Belzoni, Miss. That street, a tribute to some men's unquenchable desire to believe and others' unceasing urge to barter with that desire, is called Lady Bird Avenue.

That pathetic alley reminds one of the pointlessness of the sort of chauvinistic preening contained in the Baltimore speech. The last thing Jaycees and other Americans need to be told is how fat and rich is much of the country. What they need to learn is how wrong and unnecessary it is--in the midst of such wealth and corpulence --to have a street in Belzoni, Miss., named Lady Bird Avenue where the children are starving.

THE LONG HOT SUMMER is upon us, and with it the implicit or explicit transferral of power in major portions of our larger cities from mayors and councils to the National Guard. Americans, as the Vietnam war has shown, adapt well to violence. Rather than its accumulation horrifying us, we simply undergo a social mutation that makes it tolerable. The insurance companies adjust their rates and the militiaman's training shifts its emphasis from mortars to teargas. And business proceeds.

One of the mutations wrought by the L. H. S. has been the advent of what might be called thermopolitics. Thermopolitics is based upon the principle that appropriations for a ghetto community should fluctuate according to the mean temperature of that community.

Here in Washington thermopolitics has resulted in something called the Summer Enrichment Program. A bevy of street camps, walk-to pools, sprinkler showers, art and craft classes, preschools and "Widening Horizons" field trips are being paraded before local youth to keep their minds off the bricks

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stacked in the alley. There is particular concern here because Washington, after all, is the capital of the nation that is diligently helping the peoples of Southeast Asia and elsewhere in their search for peace and freedom and a display of distemper on the part of voteless citizens of this town would undoubtedly set back the cause of justice around the world. So the District Recreation Department's program is reviewed by a task-force of cabinet members. Hubert Humphrey turns on the lights at city playgrounds. And no doubt The Man himself had made a few phone calls to make sure everything is going right.

The difficulty with thermopolitics is that it is hard to solve all the problems of housing, employment and education in the space of three months each year. The kid returns from his bath under the sprinkler to his crowded and crumbling home. The "Widening Horizons" field trip stops short of a successful job interview in this city where a massive effort by the Board of Trade to create summer employment produced only a few hundred positions. And in September the enriched youth of summer become, once again, the students of an academically and psychologically impoverished school system.

Even Congress appears to have some doubts about the efficacy of thermopolitics. A bill is making its way through that body which would make it a federal crime to cross a state line in order to incite a riot.

Rights leaders are understandably concerned about this legislation. But perhaps they worry too much. If administered fairly, far more congressmen than civil rights leaders would become subject to its penalties. By their repeated failure to deal with pressing economic and social matters of importance to the urban poor, these legistators have done far more to incite riots than Stokely Carmichael.

Such a law, justly applied, would keep many congressmen in their home districts, fearful of being apprehended at the state border.

I suppose, however, that it is unrealistic to expect such blind justice. So it is not surprising that we find the very congressmen who have done least to help riot-prone communities most anxious to pass a bill of attainder against civil rights leaders.

There are, of course, better ways to stop riots. They cost money, require a change of heart by a large part of our society, and demand an end to the current national policy of massive procrastination on civil rights matters. It is easier to excoriate Stokely Carmichael than to improve schools, provide housing or create employment opportunities, but until we do the hard things, riot prevention will remain the unrewarding summer preoccupation of the nation.

--(s. s.)

The Capitol Hill Repertory Theatre

From the Congressional Record:

Mr. CURTIS. That is right. It was a procedural vote. But, incidentally, many of you people who allege to be liberals——

Mr. JACOBS. To who are you referring?

Mr. CURTIS. Anyone that wants to say this.

Mr. JACOBS. I have not said so myself. I wondered what you meant by "you people."

Mr. CURTIS. You, for one, because I think you do call yourself a liberal.

Mr. JACOBS. You are mistaken.

Mr. CURTIS. Let me say this——

Mr. JACOBS. Let us not engage in name calling.

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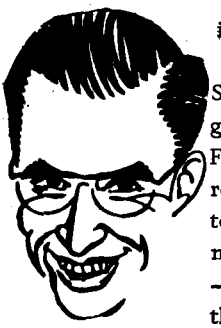

The McDowell Papers

By Charles McDowell, Jr.

IT was one of those days that San Francisco is said to take for granted. Washington sees such a day, with astonishment, maybe once or twice a year--bright sun, very cool breeze, high blue sky, and a crystal clarity of atmosphere that seemed almost to mock the prevailing mood around here.

Strolling slowly along the sidewalk that loops around the White House, I was looking through the iron fence at the blooming shrubs and the tractor driver who mows Mr. Johnson's lawn for him.

"The President and Mrs. Johnson welcome you to the White House," the iron fence said cheerfully. But it couldn't have been the fence, not even in these times of endless wonders.

"From the beginning, the White House has undergone many changes," the voice said. Peering through the fence into the periwinkle, I found the source--a tiny loudspeaker planted in the greenery.

There were about 25 of them along the fence, eight feet apart, leading to the tourists' gate to the White House. Although the voice from the periwinkle had startled me momentarily, I had been told about it by Walker C. Cottrell Jr. when it was being installed a couple of weeks ago.

Knowing that Mrs. Lyndon Johnson wanted tourists to have a chance to learn more about the mansion, Cottrell Electronics Corp. designed the sound system and donated it as a demonstration project.

Mrs. Johnson and the National Park Service approved it, the National Geographic Society provided a script, and Frank Hollingsworth of Cottrell's staff recorded the five minute tape. Now as tourists approach the gate--8,000 or more a day, Tuesday through Saturday --they can hear a description and something of the history of the White House.

I paused to make a note that Abigail Adams used the East Room as a place to hang out her wash, and then I followed the line inside with some high school students from Passaic, N. J. They did not seem much interested, frankly, in the famous Green, Blue and Red Rooms, perhaps because a loud wit among the students kept asking when they would be shown a bathroom.

Dropping back to another group of students, I heard a girl with shellacked brown hair say to one with long blonde tresses, "This is no home. It doesn't look lived-in."

Long blonde tresses replied, "They live in Texas, stupid. This is only where they dance."

Dropping back swiftly again, I finished the tour with some elementary school children from Washington. They were fascinated by the house, well-behaved and companionable. Looking at the long table in the State dining room, the little boy beside me asked a guard, "Does he sit in here just to eat his breakfast, you reckon?"

"There is a smaller family dining room," the guard said.

"That's good. What does he eat, you reckon?" We had passed the guard; that question was directed to me.

"Grapefruit," I said for some reason.

"Cool, man," my friend said.

On the sidewalk in front of the White House, I encountered the Passaic group again. They were standing in a half-circle looking at a lone, silent

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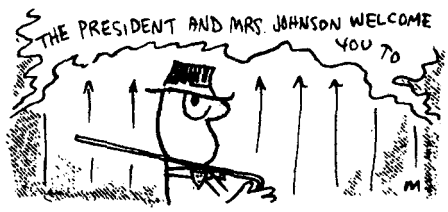
peace demonstrator. The humility of this young man may have been arguable; he was propped on a cross inscribed, "Peace on Earth."

"Good idea," said one of the Passaic boys, "but it'll never sell."

Walking on down Pennsylvania Avenue in the sunshine, I came to a freshly painted red, white and blue building in the next block between Arnold's Hofbrau restaurant and Rinaldi & Sons custom dry cleaners. The flashy building was inscribed "Nixon."



This was the newly opened headquarters of the Nixon-for-President Committee. Inside I found a bright blue carpet; red, black and white modern furniture; white walls and ceiling; huge pictures of Richard M. Nixon and Mrs. Nixon, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Arnold Palmer and other folk heroes, but no real people except a telephone operator.

Everyone was out to lunch, she said. She was taking a lot of calls. During a brief lull, she indicated a stack of documents and said, "Take one of those if you like."

I took one. It was marked "Confidential Memorandum." It said a poll had just disclosed that Nixon held a 20% lead over Gov. George M. Romney of Michigan as the Republican people believe to be "best qualified" to be President.

That inspired me to visit Romney-for-President headquarters, and this was pleasantly accomplished by walking through Lafayette Park to an old office building on 15th Street. At the end of a dark, narrow hall on the eighth floor, I found a busy suite of offices decorated with pictures of Romney inscribed, "Man of Action."

I asked William G. Murphy of the campaign staff if he had any confidential memorandums to hand out. He did not, but he said of polls, "Oh, we have our ups and downs."

After a brief chat with Murphy, I walked back past the White House and stopped to listen to Walker Cottrell's tape again. They I found a park bench in the sun and sat there speculating on who would be the next man elected to live in the White House with its responsibilities and its grapefruit. I only wondered idly, not concentrating on it enough to ruin such a grand day.

(Richmond Times-Dispatch)

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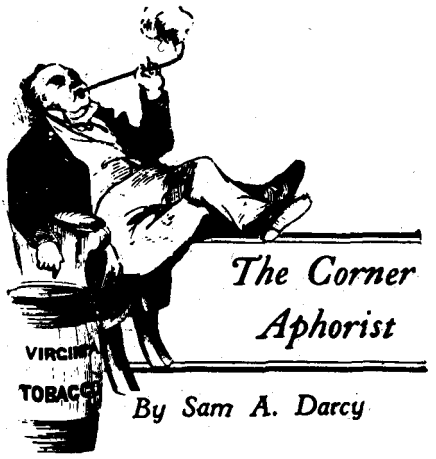

The Corner Aphorist

By Sam A. Darcy

IT IS NOW several weeks since Israel (population about 2-1/2 million--which compares with Brooklyn NY, about 3 million) blitzkrieged five Arab countries (combined population about 35 million). It was Round 3--Round 1 in 1949, Round 2 in 1956. The Arabs were doomed by their clinging to old superstitions and fear to change from even older ways.

These are the first military victories for the Hebrews in over 2000 years, the last being in the 2nd Century BC under Judas Maccabees, and the Isrealis exult. Also it pleases LBJ who is said to have had a hand in and will benefit from it.

The general aim of the war, the Zionists say, was to make Israel more secure. Has it?

They seized some more miles of Jordanian, Syrian, and Egyptian real estate. This is added to what they seized in 1956. That added to what they seized in 1949. All this has given Israel a bad reputation among her neighbors.

As a result of last month's action it is estimated that some 60,000 men, women and children were killed. Another 80,000 were maimed by gunfire. These casualties were 97 percent Arab.

About 200,000 Arab families, not too much different from yours and mine and the Israelis', were driven from their homes by Israeli armed forces. We saw pictures of children aged 7 and 8, carrying children aged 3 and 4 on their backs, trudging in the hot sun, on rough road, barefoot, frightened, with the look of hunger, fleeing Israeli military superiority. And Arab mothers whose anguished faces seemed to say, "why hast thou forsaken us, oh Lord?"

It leaves a residue of ineradicable bitterness in the hearts of 80 million Arab neighbors towards the two million Israelis. And it makes no friends for them in Pakistan, India, North Africa and all surrounding lands. That spells a far more insecure future than the

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blockade of the Strait of Tiran or some border incidents.

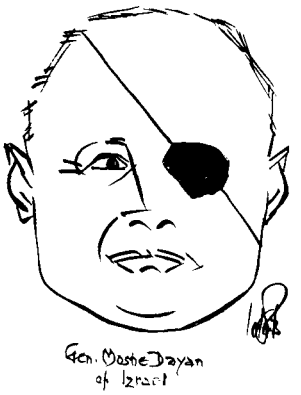
It was a war that breeds war again.

Do they know Southey's lines to the Battle of Blenheim?

"But what good came of it at last"
Quoth little Peterkin.
"Why, that I cannot tell" said he
"But 'twas a famous victory."

The Zionist leaders are having a moment of glory. What now, little men? Round 4?

➤OUR POSTMASTER PROPOSES that we turn our post office over to private enterprise. The truth is that the huge bureaucracies which rule private enterprise are, if possible, worse than those which rule government departments.



Sometimes an appeal is possible against public officials, but there is none against the private na-sayers. If we must give up some department of government, let's give up the War Department. It costs the most, destroys the most, delivers nothing that benefits anyone we know, and their free samples addressed to occupant, they can keep.

Yet we must admit that government bureaucracies are pretty bad. Did you ever hear Isaac Newton's story? It takes place in one of those huge government structures of plate glass and shiny stainless steel where government authority reaches the ultimate logic of pervasiveness. There is a long syn-

thetic marble corridor that stretches to infinity; along its walls are endless series of metal grates and tiny windows such as one sees in our large post offices. On a small shelf in front of the window is a huge pile of applications each twelve pages long. Behind each window there is a faceless bureaucratic nay-sayer.

A gentle man, with a thoughtful face, enters and after looking in both directions approaches a window marked "Requisitions #876423426".

"Pardon me, sir," he says, "I

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would like an apple."

"What's your name?"

"Newton, sir."

"Here, fill out the application blank in seven copies."

"You don't understand, sir, all I need is an apple. This blank is twelve pages long and costs more than the apple. Couldn't I have an apple without filling out the blank?"

"We have regular procedures, mister, and you must follow them. What do you want the apple for?"

"I need it for an experiment."

"An experiment, is it?" he peers out suspiciously, "what kind of an experiment?"

"You see, I have already discovered the binomial theorem and I need an apple because I plan to discover the Law of Gravity."

"What's the binomial theorem? What good is it? And by the way, who authorized you to do this? And what department wants any new laws of gravity? Have you gone through the proper channels?"

"Nobody authorized me. You see, sir, I am a natural philosopher."

"See that number, mister? #876-423426! It isn't there for nothing. That's the Requisition Department. Natural philosophers who work with one apple belong in Botany or Agriculture. Try Agriculture-Retail. That's department #417692763. Walk straight down the corridor til next Wednesday afternoon and even you can't miss it. --By the way, what's your first name?"

"Isaac, sir."

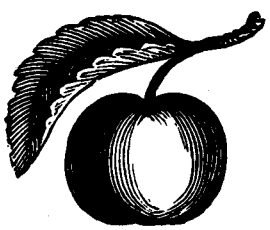
"And, oh yes, have your application blank filled out, so you don't waste anyone's time, we're very busy here, you know."

The gentle man looks crushed. The faceless bureaucratic nay-sayer picks up his cup, sips his coffee, looks annoyed and mutters scornfully: "Natural philosopher! Phui! Belongs on a

park bench! Isaac, eh? Very likely Jewish. Some pushy character trying to rate so he could make his way into our department and take over. The Supreme Court started all this trouble, encouraging nigras and foreigners! Ugh!"

Mr. Isaac Newton starts his walk down the endless corridors with an ever-increasing number of applications in hand, all filled out and all rejected for having flaws or for being filed with the wrong department, never getting his apple and never discovering gravity.

Fortunately, gravity itself is oblivious to all this and keeps doing whatever it was supposed to do.



ON MAY 22nd Langston Hughes died. This charming, talented man wrote songs, poetry and stories that gave comfort to all who ever knew the blues of poverty, war and injustice. In the

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HUGH HAYNIE ...

"Yesiree! We Gonna Make It a Federal Crime to Desecrate Our American Flag!"

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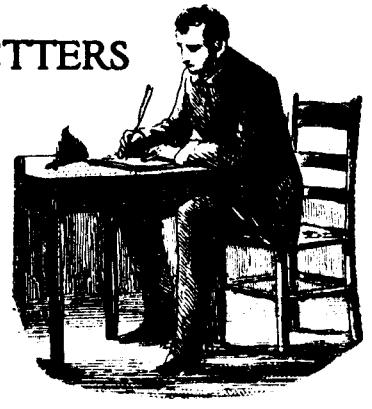
1930's he often came to our office South of the Slot in San Francisco or wherever else our journeys brought us into proximity, perched on our desk and talked about life, literature, art and my college classmate at New York University, the poet Countee Cullen. Fe men saw the world as truly as he did, also had so much inner beauty. We loved him. So did thousands of others. Our mourning is deep, we can't help that. But I think he would that we

Rather mourn the apathetic crowd
The cowed, the meek,
Who see the world and all its wrong,
Yet dare not speak.

--Ralph Chaplin

LETTERS



RIDICULOUS IDEAS

Two years ago I began subscribing to your magazine. I was very pleased with its format even though I did not agree with many of its views.

When it appeared that it was in danger of being no longer published, I was one of the first to renew. And the results have been very pleasing.

By filling your paper with ridiculous ideas and theories, numerous puns and comments, and political cartoons of very high caliber, you are creating a newspaper which gratifies very controversial viewpoints even to their most ardent opponents. This, indeed, is highly commendable.

Thomas Quick
Waterville, O.

EQUAL BILLING

Reading the IDLER is a tremendous way to spend a few minutes each month, surpassed only by the stimulation of Bleecker and Macdougal streets in New York's Village. Your publication shares equal billing with Ramparts and The Detroit Free Press on my book-shelf---if that's any encouragement. Particularly enjoy the IDLER'S layout; great imaginative something-or-other. The bit on King Lyndon was so absurd that it reaked with truth, and you people seem very perceptive when it concerns the truth of a situation, keep it going.

A Reader
Marshall, Mo.

(The Idler welcomes correspondence from its readers. Please indicate that your letter is intended for publication.)

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Letter from Lorelei

Dear sam,

Guess What? I am happy after all. Very grubby just now, having pushed and rolled an old washing machine across the yard and planted it amid the remains of my old flower garden and will now fill it with dirt and then with great big fluffy petunias. They won't wilt in the drought because now I've got water and a garden hose.

I also have two chicken houses filled with baby chicks nearby--16,000 in each house. All the captains and the kings have departed--also the kids and the dogs--; they have retreated across the Rubicon--the road--to their camp but with an occasional visit from all of them. The two mutts come for a handout first thing in the morning. One thing around here practically nobody feeds dogs and cats except dead chickens. These are regularly incinerated but the critters get their share. Bob, the chicken neighbor, tells me he will save the fattest casualties for my cats. But I mean to tell the world my cats wouldn't eat a dead chick. No Sir.

I have been reading piles of magazines and also books and I wonder often what is the Washington Post for --or against. You can't tell from their editorials. But nothing they print can make me change my mind about LBJ. And I am

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beginning to think that the frozen smile of Rusk is just a mask with nothing behind it. He looks as if he were hypnotized or had sniffed glue.

And why doesn't somebody ask him about what he said in January: that we were winning all along the line, that the VC were demoralized etc., etc.? Most of us can still read and hear and it sure doesn't sound like that to us. Aren't these acid heads ever worried about us getting tangled with China and Russia? You know, I get delayed bombs in the form of Newsweek and Time and others. They are usually a month old and by the time I get them their editorials and articles are already proven wrong whenever they have been bolstering LBJ and his gang. Who can blame Lippman for getting away from this bunch of blind mice running around not even smelling the cheese?

I have painted my kitchen. Bright and early Monday morning I opened a can of "Quick Drying Ivory Enamel" and believe it or not it is now forty -- no fifty -- hours later and it is still wet. It also stinks like old gas mains. I wonder if the mess will ever dry.

Never had this happen to me before. Should I call up Betty Furness?

Love to all of you,

Lorelei

Federalsburg, Md.

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